



News Release

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NEWS: Family, friends bid farewell to Iraq-bound West Bend Soldiers

By Tech Sgt. Jon LaDue

Wisconsin National Guard

Approximately 30 Wisconsin Army National Guard Soldiers will support medical evacuation missions in Iraq as the first Wisconsin Guard members to deploy in support of Operation New Dawn.

The West Bend-based members of the 2nd Battalion, 135th Aviation Regiment said goodbye to family and friends at a sendoff ceremony Monday (Nov. 29) at their armory. The Soldiers are comprised from three West Bend units — Detachment 1 of Company C, Detachment 2 of Company D, and Detachment 2 of Company E.

Brig. Gen. Mark Anderson, Wisconsin Army National Guard commander, compared the pride and competency of the Soldiers from the 135th with the many Wisconsin Soldiers who have previously deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan.

"I am absolutely confident that you are those same Soldiers ... because of your professionalism, your dedication and what you do in uniform," Anderson said. "Thank you so much."

Sgt. Aaron Grudich, 135th crew chief, said his unit has put in a lot of additional training to prepare for the deployment. He said the unit has really bonded during the extra time together and he is looking forward to deploying with his fellow aviation Soldiers.

"I'm kind of anxious to leave," Grudich said. "I think it will be a good experience with a good group of people."

June Grabofsky and her husband, Gerald, traveled from Montana to say farewell to her granddaughter, Pfc. Jessica Liebelt, who will report with her fellow Soldiers for mobilization training at Ft. Hood, Texas.

"She's taking it seriously and doing her very, very best," June said of Liebelt's deployment preparation. "I'm very proud of her."

Command Sgt. Maj. George Stopper, the Wisconsin Army National Guard's top enlisted leader, spoke to the Soldiers. He suggested those Soldiers with deployment experience guide the first-timers through the experience.

"Be a true battle buddy and help them through those tough times," said Stopper. "Aid them in any way that you can."

West Bend Mayor Kristine Deiss attended the ceremony and expressed gratitude on behalf of the community for the Soldiers' service and sacrifice.

"You have each other to support you when over there," Deiss said. "But you also have family, friends and a community that supports you back here."

Brig. Gen. Don Dunbar, adjutant general of Wisconsin, addressed all the friends and family of the 135th. He sympathized with them regarding the challenges they will soon face, but also expressed his appreciation for their service and the mission they will serve.

"I share your pride in these outstanding men and women," Dunbar said. "Because they are truly the best that Wisconsin has to offer."

The 135th will report to Fort Hood, Texas, for two months of mobilization training. From there, they will deploy to Iraq as the first members from the Wisconsin Army National Guard to deploy in support of Operation New Dawn. The Soldiers will deploy with three UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters to support medical evacuation missions.

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CAPTION — Capt. Randall Ramm, 2nd Battalion, 135th Aviation Regiment officer in charge, address 30 Soldiers and their families and friends during a sendoff ceremony Nov. 29 in West Bend, Wis. The Soldiers will support medical evacuation missions in Iraq as part of Operation New Dawn. Wisconsin National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Jon LaDue

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CAPTION — 1st Lt. Mark Sier, 135th Aviation Regiment, holds his 5-week old baby girl, Carolyn, before a sendoff ceremony Nov. 29 in West Bend, Wis. Sier and 30 of his fellow Soldiers are departing for Fort Hood, Texas, for two months of mobilization training before deploying to Iraq as part of Operation New Dawn. The aviation Soldiers will spend approximately 10 months in Iraq supporting medical evacuation missions. Wisconsin National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Jon LaDue

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CAPTION — West Bend Mayor Kristine Deiss speaks to Soldiers and families of the 2nd Battalion, 135th Aviation Regiment during a sendoff ceremony Nov. 29 in West Bend, Wis. More than 30 135th Soldiers will report to Fort Hood, Texas, for two months of mobilization training before deploying to Iraq to support medical evacuation missions as part of Operation New Dawn. Wisconsin National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Jon LaDue

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CAPTION — Soldiers of the 2nd Battalion, 135th Aviation Regiment stand in formation during a sendoff ceremony Nov. 29 in West Bend, Wis. Following two months of mobilization training at Fort Hood, Texas, the Soldiers will deploy to Iraq to support medical evacuation missions as part of Operation New Dawn. Wisconsin National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Jon LaDue

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